

# Jewish communities in the Merovingian towns in the second half of the sixth century as described by Gregory of Tours<sup>1</sup>

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## *A general preview*

The position of Jews in Merovingian towns in the second half of the sixth century is examined through the *Libri Decem Historiarum* written by Gregory of Tours. We can perceive the daily life of the Jewish communities and the conflicts between them and the Christian population – though Gregory himself does not deal much with this particular question his description is important for us because of the general scarcity of sources in that time.

As almost relating to the whole Merovingian period our most important source to the Jewish communities is Gregory of Tours: his *Libri decem historiarum*<sup>2</sup> and his works from the life of the saints. The daily life of the city gets central role in his works, and we can learn a lot about the life and the habits of the urban people – about those of the Christian community as well as those of the others.

First of all, it is important to provide a short overview – highlighting only the most essential facts – on what is known about the legal and social position of the Jews in Gaul in the sixth century. Worth doing it also because we have other relating sources, too: edicts, acts of councils etc.

Jewish groups arrived in greater masses to Gaul mainly after the destruction of the Second Temple (79 A. D.) – this was the diaspora. They settled principally in great cities on the Mediterranean coast, such as Marseille or Narbonne, as well

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<sup>2</sup> Henceforth referred as *Historia*.

as in the towns situated in great river-valleys or on the crossroads, such as Poitiers or Clermont-Ferrand. Of course, the commercial activity on these territories originated also from their geographical location. Jewish people as soldiers, suppliers or traders dealing with other commercial deeds often followed the Roman legions.<sup>3</sup> With the edict of Caracalla issued in 212, the Jews gained the Roman legal status similarly to any other people of the Empire, and from this time onwards the Roman laws were valid for them, too. The Gallo-Romans, the local romanized population, did not distinguish them from the Romans; they were considered Roman citizens.<sup>4</sup>

In the Frank kingdoms, the Roman population fell under the sphere of Roman law, consequently, the Franks applied it for the Jewish communities as well. In the territory of Gaul, the *Breviarium Alarici* having been created well before the arrival of the Franks and having been written in the spirit of Roman law, changed the anti-Jewish attitude of the *Codex Theodosianus*.<sup>5</sup> A similar thing happened in the time of the Franks, during the reign of Chlodwig, who continued his father's, Childeric's pro-Jewish policy, and the Salian laws regularised the position of the Jews. It was confirmed that the Jews are considered Romans whose rights and duties corresponded with that of the others (the Gallo-Romans).<sup>6</sup>

However, despite the secular legalisation of the Jews, parallel its constantly increasing influence, the Christian Church wanted to change their position in the society. The church fathers, from the fourth century onwards, formulated a determined viewpoint against them: the Jews, the "chosen people", by not having discovered the Messiah, lost its chosen status which was transferred to those pagan peoples converting to Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the church fathers also stated that the Jews were as dangerous for the Christian religion as the heretics.

### *Laws of councils against the Jews*

Thus, the Church aimed at pushing back the Jews, at least from the scenes of the social life. For example, many church councils came up with decrees stating that the Jews cannot hold certain positions. At the council of Clermont in 533, the Jews were prohibited to fulfil the office of a *iudex*.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the century, in 585,

<sup>3</sup> L. B. Glick, *Abraham's heir. Jews and Christians in medieval Europe*. Syracuse 1999, 29–30.

<sup>4</sup> E. Benbassa, *The Jews of France. A History from Antiquity to the Present*. Princeton 1999, 4.

<sup>5</sup> B. Blumenkranz, "The Roman Church and the Jews." in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*, ed., J. Cohen, New York 1991, 193. For the anti-Jewish attitude of the *Cod. Theod.* see e. g.: "*Iudaei sint obstricti caerimoniis tuis*" (XVI, 8, 13) and "*aurum adque argentum ...a singulis synagogis exactam summam ... ad nostrum dirigatur aerarium*" (XVI, 8, 14), etc.

<sup>6</sup> B. Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. Minneapolis 1977, 44–45.

<sup>7</sup> R. R. Ruether, "The Adversus Iudaeos Tradition in the Church Fathers: the Exegesis of Christian Anti-Judaism," *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*, ed., J. Cohen, New York 1991, 176–181.

<sup>8</sup> "*Ne Iudaeis Cristeanis populis iudices praeponatur*" Conc. Arver. 535. 9.§, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Concilia I. Legum III.* ed. F. Masson, Hannover 1893, 67, henceforth cited as MGH Conc.

the council of Mâcon said that a Jew should neither be a *iudex* nor a *telonarius* (a tax-collector).<sup>9</sup> This implies, that it could happen that the Merovingian state applied Jews as public officers sometimes.

But after all, what could be the main reason for the revulsion of the Christian Church? It seems clear that the Church was mainly disturbed by the existence of Jewish proselytism, that is it was afraid of the possibility of Christians converting to the Jewish religion. The Church tried to prevent this by prohibiting mixed marriages, slave keeping for the Jews and common meals between Christians and Jews, during which an induced controversy about faith might have resulted in Christians converting to Judaism. For the same reason they wanted to prevent marriages fearing that the Christian spouse should be converted. The council of Orléans held in 533 and of Clermont in 535 prohibited mixed-marriages between Jews and Christians.<sup>10</sup> At the council of Orléans in 541, it was *expressis verbis* prohibited for the Jews to convert Christians.<sup>11</sup>

The decrees in which the Jews were forbidden to keep Christian slaves, at the same time also note that in such cases when regardless the above regulation they still keep them, it is not allowed to turn them to their own religion.<sup>12</sup>

From all of these church councils, it is obvious, that the church fathers' aim was mainly to separate Jews from Christians. The council of Mâcon held in 583 went even further by prohibiting the Jews to go out to the streets and public places from Maundy Thursday until Easter Sunday (that is during the greatest Christian feast!). This proves, that physically, Jews and Christians were not separated within the city, and they had close relations with each other. For this reason, there were a lot of possibilities for mixed-marriages, and for holding converting disputes.<sup>13</sup> However, the city, not physically but spiritually, was divided into two parts, and the ecclesiastics were motivated only by the fear, that Jewish faith would impress people, whose faith was not strong enough yet. The bishops of councils would have preferred, if there had not been two separated religious parts within the cities – as we can see it later.

### *Gregory about the Jews*

In this whole matter Gregory, no doubt, follows the opinion of the fourth-century church fathers, and to tell the truth he does it in quite a stereotypic way. His

<sup>9</sup> "*Ne Iudaei Christianis populis iudices deputentur aut tolonarii esse permittantur*," Conc. Mâcon. 583. 13. §, MGH Conc. 158.

<sup>10</sup> E. g. "*ut nullus Christianus Iudeam neque Iudeus Christianam in matrimonio ducat uxorem*," Conc. Aurel. 533. 19. §, 64. "*igali societate et consortio carnali .... coetu atque convivio et a communione ecclesiae*," Conc. Arver. 535. 6. §, 67. "*Christeanis ... ne Iudeorum coniugiis misceantur*," Conc. Aurel. 538. 14 (13). §, 78. "*a Iudeorum vero conviviis etiam laicus constitutio nostra prohibuit*," Conc. Ep. 517. 15. §, 22. "*ut nullus Christianus Iudeorum conviviis participare praesumat*," Conc. Mâcon. 583. 15. §, 159.

<sup>11</sup> Conc. Aurel. 541. 31. §, MGH Conc. 94.

<sup>12</sup> Conc. Mâcon. 583. 17. §, Conc. Aurel. 541. 30. §.

<sup>13</sup> B. Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. Minneapolis 1977, 52.

accusations resemble those of Tertullian's and others written in the third–fourth centuries: the Jews are to be punished because they did not discover the Son of God in Christ, therefore they lost their chosen status, which was not limited any more to only one people, but it applied for every converted Christian, be it pagan or Jew. Gregory – in accordance with his contemporaries – considers that the greatest crime of the Jews is their wilfulness of not being able to recognize the real faith and of sticking to their errors – as Gregory writes it.

What can be revealed from Gregory's dispersed mentions of the daily life of the Jews, and, above all, of the number in the cities? In connection with the events happened in Clermont in 576, Gregory claims that 500 of them converted, and the rest left to Marseille. Would this imply that each city had several hundreds of Jewish inhabitants? It is highly improbable, since in the sixth century the whole population of these cities might have been, at the most, around a few thousand and, in this case, a Jewish community covering one tenth of this number should have had a greater impact on the life of a city than about we have information. It is much more probable that Gregory deliberately exaggerated, or it is also a possibility that there was a corruption in the text and, in deed, only 50 persons converted – but by all means it must be under 100.<sup>14</sup> However, the mere fact that there was a synagogue in each bigger city indicates that the number of the Jewish population must have been over 10. Most probably it was somewhere between 50 and 100 though, of course, it is only an assumption.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the Jews presented in the work of Gregory had Latin (Gallo-Roman) names (such as Priscus, Phatir) and everything points towards their usage of the vernacular of the local population, in this case the Latin. They spoke Hebrew only in the synagogue. There is only one place where Gregory writes that the Jews spoke Hebrew out of the synagogue. It happened that when King Gonthran entered Orléans in 583 he was jubilantly welcomed by the whole population and among them by the Jewish community as well, who they said a biblical benediction upon the king in Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> However this was considered a kind of liturgical act and this is the reason why they used the biblical language.<sup>17</sup>

As for their other habits or customs, there is not any reference for their being different in their clothing or behaviour from the Christian population either. They did not very much distinguish themselves from Christians in their appearance or exterior.<sup>18</sup> If they had, Gregory would have mentioned it, but when he writes stories about a Jew, he does not say a word about their clothes. There is only one exception, when Phatir entered to the synagogue wearing some liturgical clothes, but in this case, he did not appear in a public place.

<sup>14</sup> Glick, *Abraham's heir*, 38–39.

<sup>15</sup> Glick, *Abraham's heir*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> "Et hinc lingua Syrorum, hinc Latinorum, hinc etiam ipsorum Iudaeorum in diversis laudibus variae concrepabat." *Gregorius Turonensis, Libri decem Historiarum* (or *Historia Francorum*, henceforth LDH), VIII, 1. Vol 2, ed. R. Buchner, Darmstadt 1959, 160.

<sup>17</sup> B. Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096*. Paris 1960, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens*, 12.

Regarding their profession, the Jews were occupied traditionally in trade, though it is not clear whether in Gaul their participation in it was rather significant or only marginal. Naturally, the decline of commerce lasting well until the seventh century must be also taken into consideration during which period trading was limited to certain goods only (e. g. spices and silk, etc.).<sup>19</sup> As it was mentioned earlier, Jews settled mainly in trade centres and towns situated on the coast and at crossroads, therefore most of them had a lot of possibility to continue their commercial activities. Due to decline of commerce in general there could not be a great concurrence either. All in all, Jews – as any commercial activity in itself – occupied a moderately important role in economical life.<sup>20</sup>

Now, let us turn our attention to what kinds of daily situation Gregory presented the Jews in. There were Jews mentioned by him (we can say that the majority) who lived on commerce. Among them not only one had such a great influence that he kept business connections even with the kings. The most prominent of these Jews was Priscus<sup>21</sup> with whom King Chilperich even knotted into a high-tensioned conversation about faith to which we will turn back later. It's true that Gregory often calls the attention to the economic impact of the Jews in the cities, of course, always with a negative overtone. For instance, he says about bishop of Clermont, Cautinus that he was in close economic-financial relation with some Jews from whom he purchased valuable goods. He also adds that the Jewish merchants sold the bishop these articles for a higher prize than they bought them for.<sup>22</sup> Of course, in Gregory's eyes this attitude is to be condemned, but from the point of view of a tradesman it is absolutely understandable. It should be observed that based on this chapter, Gregory seemed to condemn "business" in this relation. His main accusation against Cautinus is that he is not a good pastor for his people (meaning Jews as well), he is not motivated by converting them, or being a solace for them. Cautinus regards the Jews as a source of money.

With the death of Bishop Cautinus the story did not finish because Eufasius, applying for his place, also obtained jewels and other valuable objects from the Jews which then he sent to the king in order to gain the bishopric with bribe as – with Gregory's words – he could not get it for his merits.<sup>23</sup>

In the above cases, there is not too much about the Jews themselves since they were only the source of the money or jewels being used unfairly by these ecclesiastical people for gaining positions. However, it is worth mentioning that Gregory always makes negative remarks about those who were in closer connection

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<sup>19</sup> Glick, *Abraham's heir*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Glick, *Abraham's heir*, 30–31.

<sup>21</sup> LDH VI, 5.

<sup>22</sup> "*Iudaeis valde carus ac subditus erat ... pro comparandis speciebus, quas, cum hic blandiretur et illi se adulatoris manifestissime declararent, maiori quam constabant pretio venundabant.*" LDH IV, 12, Vol. 1, 210.

<sup>23</sup> "*...susceptas a Iudaeis species magnas regi per cognatum suum Baregisilum misit, ut scilicet, quod meritis optinere non poterat, praemiis optineret.*" LDH IV, 35, Vol. 1, 242.

with the Jews: both the above priests, for example were drunken and very greedy. It seems that for him a good personality cannot be in touch with the Jews.

Another area of life where Jews are mentioned is medical science. Leonast, the archdeacon of Bourges after becoming blind tried everything out in order to recover and, finally, turned to a Jewish doctor who demonstrated all his practices, but – of course – could not be successful.<sup>24</sup> Though here the story is not so much about contrasting Christian and Jewish “science” but rather about confronting celestial (prayer for the saints) and terrestrial power.<sup>25</sup> The mere fact that in the *Historia* the terrestrial science is represented by a Jew sheds some light rather on a social situation than on a conscious propaganda on Gregory’s side: in the Jewish communities arriving from the East, the transmittance of medical knowledge from generations to generation could have been a tradition through centuries.

As a matter of fact, a similar event is to be found in Gregory’s *Vitae Patrum* as well: Lupus, the bishop of Bordeaux, having fallen into a serious feverish illness went to the basilica of Saint Martin to gain back his health. On his way, he met a Jew who mocked him saying that how could a dead person help a living. In this story, however, the priest did not let himself be diverted from his original purpose and stood firm in his belief that he could only gain his recovery through the power of praying, and despised the words of the “old snake”, the Devil, who spoke to him with the mouth of a Jew. In addition, not to misunderstand the moral message of the story, the Jew himself became ill as well, and since he did not accept the truth, thus did not recover. As opposed to him, another Jew who turned to Saint Martin in his final despair regained his health, and afterwards he also converted to Christianity.

Concerning other professions, there are some hints about Jews holding official positions in spite of the conciliar regulations forbidding them to do so. It seems, that until the end of the sixth century, regardless of the prohibitions, they sometimes acted as judges or tax collectors. For example, Armentarius was a *telonarius*, who went to Tours to collect payment on some bonds, which had been given to him as security of public taxes. His profession was not without danger: since the debtors did not want to pay, Armentarius and his two fellows were killed.<sup>26</sup>

There are other mentions on rare professions held by Jews, that do not appear very characteristic. Gregory mentions *maritims*,<sup>27</sup> a *vitrier*,<sup>28</sup> but these look exceptional cases.

<sup>24</sup> LDH V, 6, Vol. 1, 292.

<sup>25</sup> LDH V, 6, Vol. 1, 292. “Ideo doceat unumquemque christianum haec causa, ut, quando caelestem accipere meruerit medicinam, terrena non requirat studia.”

<sup>26</sup> LDH VII, 23, Vol. 2, 118–120.

<sup>27</sup> Gregorius Turonensis, “Gloria Confessorum,” 97. *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Miracula et opera minora*, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* (henceforth: SRM), 1, 2. ed. B. Krusch, Hannover 1885.

<sup>28</sup> SRM 1, 2, Gregorius Turonensis, “Gloria Martyrorum,” 9.

Turning to the issue of their living space, it is not apparent from Gregory's work that the Jews would live in separated and closed areas or districts within the cities, although their houses were most probably situated around the synagogues. The Jews' right to build their own houses of worship was already assured by the *Codex Theodosianus* but, at the same time, it often happened that their synagogues were destroyed by outcried and furious Christian crowds. The same happened in Orléans and when King Gonthran arrived to the city the Jews asked him to provide them with public money for being able to rebuild their synagogue. According to Gregory this was the only, selfish reason for their hearty and cordial welcome of the king. Nevertheless, Gonthran denied their request, which was a positive act in Gregory's eyes, who considers that all Jews are traitors, and they are similar to the heretics.<sup>29</sup>

### *Proselytism*

As it was already mentioned above, Jewish proselytism was a great problem for the Church. Gregory himself records several stories about polemics between Christians and Jews, and as a bishop he himself got into religious controversies with them. These disputations play the same role in his work as the contentions with the heretics. The key issue of the polemics is always Christ's being the Son of God which principle was not accepted by the Jews as opposing and challenging the Mosaic "*God is one*" – theory. It is not our – but the theologians' – duty to deeply analyse the nature of these controversies, at this point the only thing to be mentioned is that Gregory – as he explicitly stated one point – uses their own holy scripture, the Old Testament against the Jews. What is important here is that, according to the details revealed in the stories, there were some – of course the number cannot be estimated – even among the simple middle-class Jews who possessed a great knowledge of the Bible as other were skilled in medicine about what we had already talked above. The same level of education, however, cannot be said about the Gallo-Roman and Frankish middle class, even not all members of the upper classes were well acquainted with classical culture.

### *The events in Clermont in 576*

Perhaps the most relevant information on the relationship of Jewish and Christian communities can be gained from the events happened in Clermont in 576.<sup>30</sup>

At that time the bishop of Clermont was Avitus, who was the master and mentor of Gregory for which reason he had a great respect for him. Among the clergy, in general, anti-Judaism was widespread, though there were also exceptions. The earlier bishops of the city, Cautinus and Eufrosius were tolerant towards the Jews, but that was mentioned by Gregory in quite a condemnatory

<sup>29</sup> "*Vae genti Iudaicae malae et perfidae ac subdolo semper sensu viventi*" LDH VIII, 1, Vol. 2, 160.

<sup>30</sup> LDH V, 11, Vol. 1, 296.

manner.<sup>31</sup> The greatest bishop of the fifth century, Sidonius Apollinaris opposed the Jewish religion itself, but was not hostile to the individuals, indeed, he defended them. On the contrary, Avitus was implacable and much stricter, and Gregory completely agrees with him. Avitus considered his main duty was to convert all the Jews living in the city. The most important question is why was it so. Most probably not only religious emotions motivated him, he also hoped for the extinction of collisions if – as he said – “let it be only one flock and one shepherd.”<sup>32</sup> He wanted to change the state in which the city was, since Clermont had been divided into two main, though not equal parts – the Jewish part must have been considerably smaller in number –, and on certain occasions the two parties, the Christians and the Jews fell upon each other and violence was not excluded either. Interestingly enough the everyday life of the city was seemingly peaceful and calm; at least Gregory refers to the great conflicts only in connection with the significant Christian feasts.

Likewise in Clermont, where the conflict also burst out on a feast day.<sup>33</sup> Onto the head of a converted and baptized Jew, while passing in a procession together with other baptized people, another Jew as a mockery poured stinking oil. The outraged crowd wanted to stone him for his act, but Avitus prevented it. (Accordingly, the Jews were excluded from the society and their trespassing the borderline by hurting a Christian was the greatest possible crime.) On the feast of the Assumption the Christians took revenge, and the gathered crowd destroyed the Jewish synagogue. Avitus, as the story tells, did not reprove them for this, but he suggested the Jews either to convert or to leave the town. The bishop did not use violence against them and I tend to believe that sending them away was not so much an act of blackmail, but more the only possibility in the bishop's eyes to put an end to the tensions ready for bursting out without his control in every moment. He might feel that the only solution is to dissolve the reason of the very conflict: the religious separation. Thus, the Jews should either convert or there should be absolutely no Jewish community within the city walls.

Gregory's agreement and support is on Avitus' side: he touchingly and lavishly describes the baptism of the converted Jews and the bishop's tearful joy over it. Nevertheless, he had no doubts that the conversion of the Jews – at least in majority – was not real, but dissimulative. His supposition is, of course, understandable. It is also clear, however, that only few of the Jews would take upon themselves the insecurity of leaving behind their existence assured in the city. On the contrary, for the sake of their personal security they even accepted Christianity, since through their conversion they became the members of not only the spiritual but also the social community.

In relation to the incident in Clermont, it is also worth looking at a contemporary literary source. Venance Fortuné, the most famous poet of his time and a friend of Gregory, after having been requested by Gregory, wrote a poem about

<sup>31</sup> LDH IV, 12, 35.

<sup>32</sup> “*estote unus grex et unus pastor*” LDH V, 11, Vol. 1, 296. (trans. by Dalton).

<sup>33</sup> LDH V, 11.



the events.<sup>34</sup> Later Gregory himself used his friend's poem in the *Historia*, since its spiritual and theological aspects could be well exploited for his own purposes.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, there are some differences due to the distinct literary genres but more important that there are also essential discrepancies.

Venance, being a poet, described the events in a more subjective way. For example, he portrayed the resistant Jews as more pugnacious people, and the political overtone of his poem is also stronger than in Gregory's work. The bishop only says that the Jews gathered together while Venance writes about a revolt. It is obvious that from the dramaturgical point of view of the poem, it was more adequate to depict the conversion of the Jews as a consequence of a more uptight and bellicose situation. However, the truth may rather be at Gregory, who himself also does not miss the opportunity to provide colourful and touchy scenes, so it would not really understandable why he would leave out such a good opportunity to justify the bishop's decision by illustrating the rebellious behaviour of the Jews, while in other cases, such as the one of Priscus and Phatir – to be discussed a bit later – he was not afraid of depicting even the bloodiest conflicts.

However, no detailed comparison of the two works is possible now, only one small thing should be mentioned here: the argument of Bishop Avitus ("let it be one flock and one shepherd") is the same at both authors. And the conclusions also coincide: the Jews have no other choice but to convert or go away.<sup>36</sup>

In the light of the events of Clermont, the relating decisions of church councils must also be interpreted in a different way. In their decisions the fathers of these councils were certainly motivated to avoid and prevent the spontaneous pogroms outbreaking on great feasts and endangering the Jews as well as the peace of the cities. Mainly at Easter, when the Jews were explicitly named in the church as the murderers of Christ, the celebrating Christian crowds could easily fall under the influence of mass psychosis and turn against their Jewish neighbours with whom otherwise lived in peaceful harmony. On the other hand, religious tolerance was not an everyday practice at that time, and in the eyes of contemporary Christians the only solution was the conversion of Jews and they regarded the Jews' persistence on their own religion as obstinacy and perverseness. Gregory was on the same opinion.

Another, so to say, violent conversion is reported by Gregory when King Chilperic in 582 ordered to convert all the Jews in his kingdom, that is in Neustria.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the Jewish problem got a political touch. Almost the only positive remark made by Gregory about the king is to be found at that point. Chilperic, however, not only had the Jews baptized, but also became their patron by "adopting" them. One of his minions was a Jew named Priscus with whom he was in busi-

<sup>34</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, "Carmina," V, 5. ed. F. Leo-B. Krusch, MGH Auctores Antiquissimi, 4, Hannover 1881.

<sup>35</sup> Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens*, 140–141.

<sup>36</sup> Reydellet, "La conversion de juifs de Clermont en 576." in *De Tertullien aux Mozarabes: mélanges offerts à Jacques Fontaine*. Paris 1992, Tome 1, 371–379, 371–373.

<sup>37</sup> LDH VI, 17, Vol. 2, 34–36.

ness relation. Gregory got involved in a theological controversy with this man and, together with the king, he tried to persuade Priscus about the truth of Christianity arguing with the words of the Old Testament.<sup>38</sup> Among others, Gregory's aim with describing of this scene was, of course, to demonstrate that the king was not able to convince Priscus with his arguments and could not find the good answers for Priscus' objections, so he had to give over the floor to the theologically more skilled bishop. Gregory and Chilperic could not persuade Priscus either, through the Jew was also unable to react for the bishop's words. The polemics was, of course, mainly around whether Jesus was the Son of God or not. Finally, the whole story ends with the benediction of the king who, in this case, exceptionally supported the bishop.

The forced conversion of the Jews in Neustria was not successful anyway, and even a murder had happened as Priscus was killed by Phatir, one of his baptized Jewish relatives (who, by the way, was later slaughtered by the relatives of Priscus). Certainly, Gregory's purpose here was to prove that Chilperic did not manage to carry out his only approvable decision and, as opposed to Chlodwig, he was not a successful christianizing king. Nevertheless, what is more important for us is what the king's purpose was with converting the Jews? The answer may coincide with the one previous expressed: to avoid local conflicts and – perhaps – to gain “good points” in the eyes of the Church.

Summing up, it can be stated, that the Jews in the Merovingian towns were not different from the Christian population neither in their language, nor in their behaviour and customs, and they were not enclosed or separated either. Their houses being built around the synagogue did not mean a closed Jewish quarter.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, we also know that the policy of the Merovingian state was not anti-Jewish, since it was not in the interest of the rulers to harm the Jews. They were very useful in business sometimes. They were not in a worse status than any other people in the country: naturally, they were often victims of civil wars and local revolts.

The only thing that distinguished Christians and Jews from each other was religion.<sup>40</sup> And the fact that religion became the source of such big conflicts during the sixth century indicates the increasing influence of the Christian Church. At local (urban) level the bishops represented the power of the Church and the state as well, and they considered dangerous the existence of a group whose life and acts were out of their control. Naturally, Gregory as one of the biggest bishops of his time also represented this viewpoint in his works. Jews were not better than heretics since, on the level of theology, they diverged from the true faith and, on the level of everyday life, with their otherness they only caused trouble and chaos. When, in his *Vitae Patrum*, Gregory writes about Saint Gall, proves

<sup>38</sup> “Ego vero non de euangeliiis et apostolo, quae non credis, sed de tuis libris testimonia praebeens proprio te mocrune confodiam” LDH VI, 5, Vol. 2, 10.

<sup>39</sup> B. Blumenkranz, “The Roman Church and the Jews.” in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*. ed. J. Cohen, New York 1991, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens*, 12.

this. He mentions that at the death of the saint there were also Jews in the mourning crowd crying and weeping together with the Christians compassionately over their great loss. Consequently, a holy bishop is able even in his death to unify the different inhabitants of his city. Similarly, as we could see it earlier, Avitus wanted to unify the two parts of the city in the name of religion, but his intention failed. The Jewish population meant a danger for the Christian faith and people. Since the Jews were not isolated from the Christian community and they had close relations – business and social – from the Church's point of view they could have deterred the believers from Christianity.<sup>41</sup> The bishop's main duty was to keep the city in peace and for this sake he was permitted to take any steps.

Of course, since Gregory's work was written mainly on Church cases, he regards the Jewish question from the point of view of what we can learn from the bishops. This is the reason why it is so important to depict so many stories on the relation between bishops and Jews. The picture Gregory presents is very one-sided and does not show the Jews as they were but as the Church saw them.

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<sup>41</sup> Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy*, 52.